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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001942

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR D, SA, SA/INS, SA/PD, S/CT; DS/DSS/ITA; DS/IP/NEA/SA  
DEPARTMENT ALSO PLEASE PASS TOPEC  
NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: Sri Lanka update: PM begins next steps in governing; President invites PM for talks

Refs: (A) Colombo-SA/INS 11/10/03 unclass email  
- (B) Colombo 1930, and previous

(U) Classified by Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead.  
Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Prime Minister Wickremesinghe has begun consulting with party members and members of the international community to map out the next steps for his government. Indications are that he may transfer control of the peace process to President Kumaratunga, given difficulties with her responsibility for defense matters. Reports indicate that Parliamentarians will request that the President resume Parliament earlier than November 19. On November 10, President Kumaratunga, for her part, invited the PM for talks, following her November 7 call for the formation of a "government of reconciliation." Despite earlier reports, the President's office now denies that a state of emergency was ever declared. A planned visit by Norwegian peace facilitators is still on. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) PM RETURNS, BEGINS CONSULTING: Following Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's November 7 return to Colombo, the PM spent the weekend consulting with party leaders in an effort to map the next steps for his government. (Note: The 19-mile journey from the airport took the Prime Minister 9 hours as crowds thronged the route in a show of support.) On November 9, the PM met with Ambassador Lunstead, Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar, and separately with Indian High Commissioner Nirupam Sen, outlining possible UNP actions. Septel contains a readout of this and other meetings.

3. (C) NO SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR PEACE: G.L. Peiris, a key government minister and the United National Party (UNP) spokesman told a press conference on November 9 that the PM was willing to transfer responsibility for the peace process to President Kumaratunga. Referring to the President's control of the defense portfolio, Peiris noted that there could not be a situation of "shared responsibility" between the President and PM. He further stated that, in the view of the government, it would not be possible to proceed with the peace process unless one party had full control. Peiris added that "if he (the PM) does not control defense, the interior and the media, it is not possible for the Prime Minister to accept responsibility for the process."

4. (C) SPEAKER CONVENES PARTY LEADER MEETING: Speaker of Parliament J.M. Perera called a meeting of Parliamentary party leaders on November 10 to discuss the situation following President Kumaratunga's November 4-5 actions. In addition to the PM's United National Party (UNP) leaders, members of the Tamil parties -- Tamil National Alliance, Ceylon Workers Congress, Upcountry People's Front -- as well as the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress also attended the meeting. The President's People's Alliance (PA) party, the Muslim National Unity Alliance (NUA), and the extremist Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) boycotted the meeting. According to Mission contacts, of those present at the meeting, it was unanimously decided to petition the Speaker that Parliament be reconvened on November 12. The petition, to be signed November 11, would then be submitted to the President.

5. (C) PRESIDENT INVITES PM FOR TALKS, OUTLINES PLANS TO NATION: Late November 10, the President's office released a statement, saying that the President has invited the PM for talks regarding her November 7 call for a "Grand Alliance" of all parties. The invitation follows her televised November 7 speech (ref A) to the nation where President Kumaratunga cited her reasons for assuming control of the defense and interior portfolios and called for a national government of reconciliation. In the speech, the President said her decision to take control of the ministries was based on the "callous irresponsibility" of the government's actions regarding

defense and police matters. Later, she shared her proposals for Sri Lanka's future, including:

-- Grand Alliance: The President called on all parties in Parliament, asking them to join her in a "Grand Alliance" with the objective of forming a "Government of National Reconstruction and Reconciliation."

-- Ceasefire: Despite declaring the ceasefire "invalid" because it was not "signed under the hand of the President," she later stated that the ceasefire "will continue to stand." The President further said that the armed forces "have been instructed by me to abide by the ceasefire agreement."

-- Norwegian Facilitators: Qualifying her support for the Norwegians as peace process facilitators, the President indicated the Norwegians' efforts will continue with "clear instructions regarding the parameters and limits of their responsibilities."

-- Peace Process: The President called upon the Prime Minister to continue the peace process, while she retained responsibility for defense issues.

-- Parliament: Referring to its two-week suspension, the President declared that Parliament "will meet from November 19 onwards."

16. (C) NO STATE OF EMERGENCY, DESPITE EARLIER REPORTS: In an official press release on November 7, the President's office said that a state of emergency had not been signed by the President. Contrary to earlier media reports (November 4-6) that a state of emergency had been declared and the President's own November 5 admission to Charge' about the state of emergency (see Ref B), the press release stated that emergency regulations had been prepared only for an "eventuality." Those draft regulations, the release said, led to the belief that a state of emergency had actually been declared. Instead, the President reportedly ordered armed forces to protect certain government installations, under public security ordinances already in place.

17. (C) NORWEGIAN VISIT STILL ON: Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar confirmed to Ambassador that the planned November 10-13 Sri Lanka visit by Vidar Helgesen, Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister, and special envoy Erik Solheim was going forward as scheduled. The visit, planned in the wake of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) October 31 counterproposals submitted to the GSL, was to evaluate the island-wide reaction to the counterproposals and discuss modalities for returning to talks. The Norwegian team is still planning to travel to the Vanni and meet with the LTTE, presuming the Sri Lankan Air Force provides a helicopter, as usual. A late report on November 10 is that Tiger leader V. Prabhakaran himself will meet with them.

18. (C) COMMENT: In contrast to the President's sudden November 4-5 actions, the Prime Minister, buoyed by overwhelming support upon his return from Washington, has carefully begun to address the political situation. While his party has gone about efforts to continue governing and retaining support, the PM has focused on the need for the peace process to continue with a sole responsible leader. The President, perhaps sensing she miscalculated, has tried to soften her actions by calling for all parties to work together, including inviting the PM for talks (in addition to her clumsy effort to wriggle out of the state of emergency issue now that she sees the negative fallout from it). The PM, however, seems in little mood for a compromise. As for the Tigers, despite low rumblings of discontent over the President's actions, they remain quietly wary. END COMMENT.

19. (U) Minimize considered.

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